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SMALLPOX, NOT PLAGUE, AT CHATTANOOGA, TENN.

There were in circulation recently rumors that plague existed in Chattanooga, Tenn. An officer of the Public Health Service was sent to investigate conditions, and his report will be found on page 327. There was no evidence whatsoever of the present or past existence of plague in Chattanooga. There was, however, an outbreak of virulent smallpox, and this undoubtedly explains the origin of the false rumors regarding plague.

The smallpox infection in this outbreak apparently came originally from Mexico, where the virulent type prevails quite generally. This virulent type is being continually imported from Mexico into the United States. It has usually entered this country across the international boundary, and most of the resulting outbreaks of the disease have been in California, Texas, Arkansas, and Oklahoma. It may be that outbreaks of virulent smallpox in other parts of the country for which it was impossible to trace the origin of the infection also came from Mexico, but left no trail by which they could be traced.

It has been the usual experience in this country that whenever an unusual outbreak of any communicable disease occurred in a city, and more particularly in the larger cities, the local commercial interests, through the local press, attempted to belittle the importance of the outbreak and to refrain from publishing full information. The usual result of such a course is that rumors begin to spread to neighboring communities and States. Rumors in the absence of a knowledge of the facts seem to produce in the minds of people of the neighboring communities a fear and dread out of all proportion to that merited by actual conditions. In such instances the establishment of commerce-embarrassing quarantines by other cities are by no means unusual. This appears to have been the course of events at Chattanooga.

In its own interests and to avoid uncalled-for fear and unwarranted precautionary measures on the part of other communities, the only course a city can follow when it has an unusual outbreak of a communicable disease is full publicity. This robs rumor of its demoraliz-

ing effect and creates in the minds of outsiders a belief that the affected community has conditions well in hand and is capable of controlling the epidemic. Publicity seems to show confidence on the part of the affected community and to produce confidence in others.

DIFFICULTIES IN OBTAINING AGES.

POPULAR IGNORANCE AND CARELESSNESS REGARDING ONE'S BIRTHDAY AND AGE.

By C. W. STILES, Professor of Zoology, Hygienic Laboratory, United States Public Health Service.

Recently, during a study of about 5,000 school children, whites and negroes, in counties X and Z, the point was brought out very strikingly that there is a very great carelessness or ignorance among school children in reference to their age and birthday.

Still more striking, this ignorance was not entirely absent from the parents.

Were the question of child labor in the mills at issue, discrepancies in data given in answer to questions would be expected, but the study involved school children who had no possible ground for deception and they knew I was their friend, hence they had no reason to fear me.

A few instances of the many cases that came to notice may be cited with profit.

If a child is asked his or her age the reply may cover the age at the last or at the next birthday. There seems to be no rule in regard to this point. If the question asks specifically for the age at last birthday, the age at next birthday will frequently be given.

High-school white pupils, even in the junior and senior years, have given me two or even three different ages and it has been impossible for me to determine the correct age.

One boy of about 10 years assured me that he was "8, going on 12."

Girls of 15 have claimed to be 13 to 17 years old.

The question arises: Is a lack of knowledge of one's age a sign of lack of mentality? My experience would lead me to assume that while mental defectives and very young children may not know their year-age, no reliable conclusion as to mentality can be drawn, predicated upon this point, for among the many instances that have come to my notice was one in which a university graduate signed an oath as 3 years younger than the records showed him to be. This man acted in good faith and held to this point until the proof was produced that he was in error.

When children are asked the day of their birthday, correct answers will be obtained from the majority, but in my experience it is a common matter for a school pupil (even a high-school pupil in some cases) not to know either the day or the month of his or her birth.